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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: AVIAN FLU TRIPWIRES

REF: A) COLOMBO 1592, B) COLOMBO 1992

11. US EMBASSY COLOMBO'S TRIPWIRES AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS FOR VARIOUS AVIAN INFLUENZA (AI) SCENARIOS WERE PREPARED BY POST'S AVIAN INFLUENZA WORKING GROUP (AIWG) AND HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY THE EMERGENCY ACTION COMMITTEE (EAC). WE INVITE AND WELCOME FEEDBACK FROM RELEVANT OFFICES AND AGENCIES WITH EXPERTISE IN EMERGENCY PLANNING AND/OR INFLUENZA.

12. POST'S FOREIGN SERVICE MEDICAL OFFICER, ECONOMIC OFFICER, CHIEF OF CONSULAR SECTION AND AID HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OFFICER ARE MEMBERS OF THE AIWG. IN ADDITION TO CONSULTING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND MULTILATERAL REPRESENTATIVES (REFS A AND B) AND PREPARING THESE TRIPWIRES, POST HAS DISTRIBUTED AN ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE TO ALL PERSONNEL REGARDING AI SYMPTOMS AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES. THE CONSULAR SECTION HAS ALSO INCLUDED A LINK TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT AVIAN FLU FACT SHEET WITHIN ITS MEDICAL INFORMATION PAGE FOUND AT HTTP://SRILANKA.USEMBASSY.GOV/MEDICAL_INFORMATION.HTML. THE AIWG WILL CONTINUE PLANNING FOR A POSSIBLE PANDEMIC, INCLUDING REFINEMENT OF PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY PERSONNEL IN THE EVENT OF A PANDEMIC.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

13. THE AIWG HAS MADE THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS FOR PLANNING PURPOSES:

THE CURRENT THREAT TO PERSONS IN SRI LANKA, AND USG PERSONNEL IN PARTICULAR, IS LOW. NO BIRD HAS YET BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH AI IN SRI LANKA. THE CONTINGENT RISK IS THAT H5N1 BEGINS TO TRANSMIT ACTIVELY BETWEEN HUMANS. RISK WOULD BE MANAGEABLE IF HUMAN-TO-HUMAN TRANSMISSION OCCURRED ONLY IN CASES OF EXTENSIVE INTIMATE CONTACT. TRANSMISSION BY CASUAL HUMAN-TO-HUMAN CONTACT WOULD REQUIRE RAPID ACTION TO PROTECT OUR PERSONNEL.

THERE IS A LOW PROBABILITY THAT SRI LANKA WOULD BE AT THE CENTER OF ANY OUTBREAK OF HUMAN-TO-HUMAN AI INFECTION. BUT IF CASUAL CONTACT WOULD RESULT IN AI INFECTION, SRI LANKA IS ONLY A SHORT AIRLINE FLIGHT AWAY FROM PROBABLE OUTBREAK CENTERS.

SRI LANKAN MEDICAL FACILITIES ARE ALREADY NEAR CAPACITY EVEN WITHOUT AN EPIDEMIC OF ANY SORT. MEDICAL FACILITIES WILL BE UNABLE TO HANDLE MORE THAN A FEW CASES. THERE ARE NO ENTIRELY SUITABLE ISOLATION WARDS SHOULD H5N1 HUMAN-TO-HUMAN TRANSMISSION BECOME HIGHLY EFFICIENT.

DEPENDING ON THE SPEED OF A HUMAN-TO-HUMAN OUTBREAK, U.S. CITIZENS COULD BE QUICKLY CUT OFF FROM EVACUATION ROUTES.

POST WOULD BE UNABLE TO OBTAIN ESSENTIAL MEDICAL AND BASIC SUPPLIES IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS AND SHOULD STOCKPILE ADEQUATE PROVISIONS.

TRIPWIRES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

THE AMBASSADOR HAS APPROVED THE FOLLOWING TRIPWIRES AND POSSIBLE ASSOCIATED ACTIONS:

14. TRIPWIRE ONE: Significant occurrences of AI transmitted from birds or other animals to other birds or animals emerge in Sri Lanka; no evidence of sustained transmission to humans. (Note: "Significant occurrences" include transmission to a population of non-migratory birds or animals within a geographically limited area or transmission in more than one area of the country. "Sustained transmission to humans" is the transmission of disease beyond the situation where a single infected person transmits to another single person with whom he/she is in extremely close physical contact, e.g., sick child to mother. End Note.)

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Restrict official and unofficial travel to affected areas, bird markets and similar facilities.

- Reiterate current Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations regarding AI prevention: reinforce caution against consuming improperly cooked eggs or poultry meat as well as advise on proper handling of raw poultry products; advise people to avoid butcher or wet markets where poultry is prepared; consider issuing further recommendations regarding preparation or consumption of poultry.

- Release a warning announcement to Mission personnel and a warden message to private US citizens and post the announcement on the website.

- Hold a town hall meeting with the American community to discuss AI and other topics of interest.

15. TRIPWIRE TWO: Any case of bird-to-human or animal-to-human transmission of AI in Sri Lanka

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Restrict travel to affected areas.

- Release a warning announcement to Mission personnel, a warden message to private US citizens and post the announcement on the website. Information will include details of the episode, instructions on watching for signs and symptoms of avian influenza, triage criteria and the use of personal protective equipment.

- Begin stockpiling water and canned goods to prepare for possible need to quarantine individuals returning from areas where human-to-human transmission may occur (i.e., prepare for Tripwire 3).

- Instruct Embassy community regarding the medical response and Emergency Action Committee (EAC) Plan.

- Begin regular communication with Overseas School of Colombo and/or other international schools used by US families at the embassy on their AI preparations and plans.

16. TRIPWIRE THREE: Sustained human-to-human transmission occurs as evidenced by a cluster of cases in countries with regularly scheduled direct flights to Sri Lanka (e.g., China, India, Maldives, Thailand)

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- EAC discuss the possibility of requesting authorized departure of U.S. family members and non-emergency personnel.

- Personnel who have frequent contact with the public will use protective gear including masks. Visitors will be screened by appropriate Mission personnel by taking their temperatures as well as question them regarding recent travel history and history of respiratory and flu-like symptoms.

- Restrict travel to affected countries.

- Do not grant country clearances to non-emergency TDY personnel from or transiting affected countries.

- Set up open-air facility on compound for medical triage.
- Quarantine USG and Foreign Service National (FSN) personnel who are returning to Sri Lanka from affected countries for two weeks or for the predetermined time of virus incubation.

- Order mandatory sick leave with enforced quarantine at home for any employee who shows any flu-like symptoms or has a family member with flu-like symptoms.

- Issue a public announcement to private American citizens.

- Continue communication with Overseas School of Colombo and/or other international schools used by US families at the embassy on their AI policies.

- Establish daily briefings on AI status/cases with Ministry of Health or WHO.

- Close American Center Library to public access until further notice.

17. TRIPWIRE FOUR: Sustained human-to-human transmission in Sri Lanka

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Provide emergency consular services only.

- Possibly implement authorized departure. EAC discuss ordered departure (on the assumption that the airlines will take passengers from countries where human-to-human transmission has occurred).

- Consider implementing selective administrative leave for FSNs and for those Americans who remain at post. Those on administrative leave are instructed to self-quarantine to the greatest possible degree. Consider other options for minimizing workplace exposure (e.g., teleconferencing). Prepare a plan for minimal staffing should Tripwire 5 occur.

- Order mandatory sick leave with enforced quarantine at home of any employee who shows any flu-like symptom or has a family member with flu-like symptoms.

- Permit visitors embassy access for emergency purposes only.

- Consider using designated space to isolate emergency personnel (those not on leave) to prevent risk of transmitting to families or to others who are on leave.

- Personnel who have frequent contact with the public will use protective gear including masks. Visitors will be screened by appropriate Mission personnel by taking their temperatures as well as question them regarding recent travel history and history of respiratory and flu-like symptoms.

- Cancel local community gatherings until confirming there are no immediate further occurrences of cases in Sri Lanka.

- Advise closure of Overseas School of Colombo and/or other international schools used by US families at the embassy. Consider ordering American USG families to keep their children home from school.

- Those personnel who are required to be in direct contact with potentially infected persons will be considered as candidates for antiviral prophylaxis.

- Release a warning announcement to Mission personnel, provide a warden message to private US citizens and post the information on the website. Information will include details of the episode(s) and advice on means of prevention.

18. TRIPWIRE FIVE: One or more Embassy or in-country personnel sustain human-to-human transmission

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Order mandatory sick leave with enforced quarantine at home for affected personnel.

- Initiate treatment of affected individuals with antivirals.

- Those personnel who are required to be in direct contact with potentially infected persons will be considered as candidates for antiviral prophylaxis.

- Release a warning announcement to Mission personnel, provide a warden message to private US citizens and post the information on the website. Information will include details of the episode(s) and advice on means of prevention.

19. POST-TRIPWIRE DETERMINATIONS

The AIWG will continue monitoring the situation and recommend to the EAC when particular threats are no longer substantial. Advice from in-country contacts as well as medical and agricultural contacts worldwide will be used in forming such recommendations.

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